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Date: May 3, 2012

REQUEST FOR PUBLIC COMMENTS
Rim Butte OHV Jeep Trails
Scoping for Proposed Action
Bend/Fort Rock Ranger District, Deschutes National Forest
Deschutes County, Oregon

You are invited to review and comment on this proposal. For your comments to be most helpful, please respond by May 31st, 2012. We would like to hear from you.

The Bend/Fort Rock Ranger District of the Deschutes National Forest is interested in your comments regarding a proposal to implement a motorized off highway vehicle (OHV) trail project on the Bend/Fort Rock Ranger District. The Rim Butte OHV Jeep Trail Project would designate a motorized Class II trail system as part of the Deschutes National Forest's strategy for implementing the Forest Service's National 2005 Travel Management Rule. The District is developing this proposal to allow for long-term sustainable motor vehicle use on the forest while balancing resource objectives with public and agency needs. Our staff has been working with various members of the community to help develop this proposal and we are now ready to receive public comment on the proposed action.

Location Description

The Rim Butte OHV project is located on the Bend/Fort Rock Ranger District east of US Highway 97 and south of the Newberry National Volcanic Monument. Proposed trails are located in portions of the Long Prairie and Pine Lake - Devils Garden 10th field watersheds.

The proposed Class II trails are shown on the attached map (see Figure 1), and are roughly bounded by Forest Road 2121 on the west; Forest Road 22 on the south; Forest Road 2230 on the east; and the Newberry National Volcanic Monument on the north. A detailed map will be posted on the Deschutes National Forest website at:

http://data.ecosystem-management.org/nepaweb/nepa_project_exp.php?project=39213

Legal Description

Legal descriptions of the extent of proposed trails are as follows: Township 22 South, Range 12 East, Section 33 on the northwest corner; T23S, R12E, Section 8 on the southwest corner; T23S, R14E, Section 17 on the southeast corner; and T22S, R14E, Section 24 on the northeast corner.

Forest Plan Management Areas

The Deschutes National Forest Land and Resource Management Plan (Forest Plan) guides all management activities on the Forest. It establishes overall goals and objectives, and standards and guidelines for proposed activities, including specific "management area" guidance for



resource planning. Trails proposed for the Rim Butte project lie entirely within General Forest (management area - M8) and a small portion of Scenic Views (management area - M9).

Background

Under the 2005 Travel Management Rule, cross-country travel by motorized vehicles, including jeeps and other OHVs is not allowed, except where designated.¹ The Rule called for collaboration with stakeholders when National Forests designate routes and areas open to motorized use. The Forest collaborated with a Travel Management Working Group between 2009 and 2011 to identify areas appropriate for designated OHV routes. The current proposal is within such an area. It was also an area recommended by the Provincial Advisory Committee for the possibility of designating motorized trails.

Existing Condition

Currently, the Bend/Fort Rock Ranger District has approximately 318 miles of designated OHV trails and areas open to a variety of highway and non-highway licensed vehicles. The designated trail miles are primarily 50 inch wide treads open to quad ATVs (Class I) and motorcycles (Class III) within the East Fort Rock OHV trail system. Trails designated for 4-wheel drive Jeeps (Class II) are currently limited to approximately 25 miles of trail in the Edison Butte and 8 miles in the Three Trails OHV areas, and a designated rock crawling area within the Groundhog Butte pit. There are currently no designated motorized Class II trails within the proposed Rim Butte OHV area, although Maintenance Level II roads are open to all classes of motorized use.²

Purpose and Need

The Rim Butte OHV Jeep Trail proposal responds to direction in the Forest Service Travel Management Rule and was developed in accordance with the general and specific criteria identified in the Forest Service Manual (FSM 7715) and Code of Federal Regulations (36 CFR 212.55) for designating motorized trail systems. The Travel Management Rule directs national forests to provide for motorized use while minimizing the potential for resource damage resulting from that use. Forest Service policy directs land managers to provide a diversity of off-road recreational opportunities when use is compatible with established land and resource objectives; where use is consistent with resource capability and suitability; when the off-road opportunity is an appropriate National Forest recreation activity; and when there is a demonstrated demand for these opportunities (FSM 2355).

In addition, the Deschutes National Forest Land Resource Management Plan (LRMP) directs land managers to provide a full range of recreation opportunities, maintain existing trail systems, provide additions or modifications which will meet increasing and changing demands in dispersed recreation, and to designate trails and areas where OHVs can operate legally. The

¹ Code of Federal Regulations (CFR) Chapter 36, sections 212, 251, 261, and 295. The Deschutes National Forest completed an environmental impact statement in 2011 that identified all areas open for motorized travel on a Motor Vehicle Use Map (MVUM). Consequently, motor vehicles are prohibited from using any areas not displayed on the MVUM unless and until NEPA is completed to create new designated routes and/or areas.

² A "Maintenance Level II road" is a road that is open for use by high-clearance vehicles. Traffic is normally minor, usually consisting of one or a combination of administrative, permitted, dispersed recreation, or other specialized uses.

purpose of the Rim Butte OHV Project is to designate appropriate motorized trails for Class II OHVs that provide a suitable experience for users while minimizing resource damage.

The need for a site-specific proposal results directly from the public involvement process and implementation of the Travel Management Rule on the Deschutes National Forest. The public involvement process recognized groups that would be most affected by the Rule's prohibition of motorized travel off of designated routes and identified areas where there was community support to consider designating motorized trail systems. During this process, motorized users identified a lack of designated motorized trails for Class II vehicles and expressed their concerns for the impacts to their recreational experiences that would result from the restriction of cross country travel when the Rule was implemented. Implementation of the Rule in 2011 has since reduced the amount of area available to Class II motorized recreation groups for a technical off road trail experience. Although Class II vehicles are allowed on all motorized mixed-use roads identified as open on the Motor Vehicle Use Maps (MVUMs), driving on roads does not offer a desirable recreational trail experience for many of these motorized users. As a result, there is a need to provide an additional designated system of technical jeep trails in a suitable and sustainable location that minimizes impacts to resources and provides a worthwhile trail experience.

Proposed Action

The Deschutes National Forest proposes to designate approximately 30 miles of Class II OHV trails in the Rim Butte area to provide a loop trail system with a variety of technical challenge levels. Designated routes would be located on areas of existing disturbance, such as roads or skid trails, as much as possible. New trail would be designated in some locations and require minimal construction or vegetative disturbance to define the trail tread. Obstacles would be left to create technical difficulty and minimize safety concerns associated with access by non-Class II motorized vehicles.

Proposed trail locations were identified by trail planners from the Central Oregon Combined Off Highway Vehicle Operations (COHVOPS) and have been briefly reviewed by stakeholder user groups. The current mapped location of the proposed trails is somewhat general in nature and will be adjusted according to public input, landscape features and resource issues. A detailed map of the proposed trail locations will be posted on the Deschutes National Forest website at http://data.ecosystem-management.org/nepaweb/nepa_project_exp.php?project=39213.

Public Involvement

We are seeking your input to help us identify any issues associated with the proposed action. We welcome your comments anytime during the project; however, **your comments would be most helpful if received by May 31st, 2012.** Please make your comments as specific as possible. We plan to complete an Environmental Assessment by November, 2012 which would be available for a 30-day public review. **If you would like more information, or to discuss the project, please contact Peter Sussmann at (541) 383- 5594.**

How to Provide Comments

I am inviting your comments on this proposal. This scoping comment period is intended to

provide those interested in or affected by this proposal an opportunity to make their concerns known prior to a decision being made by the Responsible Official. Your comments will be used to help us identify any resource-related issues with the proposal which could lead to alternatives or mitigation.

Comments may also be submitted electronically to comments-pacificnorthwest-deschutes-bend-ftrock@fs.fed.us. Please put "Rim Butte OHV Scoping" in the subject line of your email. Comments must be submitted as part of the actual e-mail message, or as an attachment in Microsoft Word, rich text format (rtf), or portable document format (pdf) only. In cases where no identifiable name is attached to a comment, a verification of identity will be required for appeal eligibility. If using an electronic message, a scanned signature is one way to provide verification. E-mails submitted to e-mail addresses other than the one listed above, in other formats than those listed, or containing viruses will be rejected.

Comments may also be submitted in writing by mail or in person. Written comments should be sent or delivered to: Brant Petersen, Deputy District Ranger, Bend/Fort Rock Ranger District, 63095 Deschutes Market Road, Bend, Oregon 97701. Hand-delivered and oral comments may be delivered to the same address during normal business hours: 8:00 a.m. to 4:30 p.m. Monday through Friday, excluding holidays. Oral comments may also be provided via telephone (541) 383-4000 during normal business hours.

Sincerely,

A. SHANE JEFFRIES
District Ranger

